

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Citizen Advisory Councils

C H A R T E R

NEED

Many organized groups are vitally interested in Montana's fish, wildlife, and parks resources. These groups have become more specialized in their interests, making it a challenge for FWP to gather broad input on issues. Especially at the regional level, FWP has an increasing need to more fully involve citizens, sportsmen and sportswomen and non-traditional constituents in decision making, policy development and communication based on regard for the resource, mutual respect and personal relationships. An advisory committee comprised of key citizens can help the department achieve its goals by serving two main functions: providing the agency with information, ideas, emerging trends and initiatives from the public in a setting that welcomes diverse interests, and providing a vehicle for FWP to inform key citizens – with the expectation that they will in turn inform the broader public. This exchange of information, ideas and opinions should identify and address potential conflicts, inform various constituencies about management of public resources, and present management choices in a broad context.

PURPOSE

Citizen Advisory Councils (CAC) in each region will help Fish, Wildlife & Parks to be responsive and responsible public-resource managers. Citizen advisors can help the department operate efficiently and effectively within the constraints of state law, FWP Commission rules and department policy. While CAC recommendations are welcome, the primary role of the group is to offer informed advice to the department and to participate in honest, open and respectful dialog. Recommendation and advice must be legal, in accordance with policy, and fiscally responsible. The CAC will be strictly advisory, and recommendations are neither legally nor administratively binding.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Regional CACs will advise Fish, Wildlife & Parks on various regional and statewide programs and policies, identify areas in which the department can be more effective, and offer insight and guidance from members' own experiences and constituencies. Citizen advisors will help identify emerging trends and resolve conflicts before they become intractable, and act as FWP ambassadors to various interest groups and geographic communities. Fish, Wildlife & Parks employees will benefit from having a deeper understanding of public priorities and expectations, and advisors can function as a trusted "sounding board" for ideas and initiatives. CAC members also serve to encourage FWP employees to become more accessible and responsive to the public. Citizen Advisory Council members will benefit from understanding FWP programs, priorities, administrative processes and limitations in a broader context.

SCOPE OF AUTHORITY

Service on CACs is strictly voluntary. The group is advisory in nature and will not have authority over any private or public land, personnel issue, state or federal agency or non-

governmental organization. No CAC recommendation will commit FWP resources without the express consent of Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

CAC FUNCTION WITH LEGISLATORS

The CACs have hosted several legislative open houses. CAC members may address the assembled legislators regarding issues they are interested in. Also, individual CAC members are welcome to contact their legislators regarding issues. FWP takes no role in CAC members' individual contacts with legislators.

MEMBERSHIP

Regional CAC candidates will be identified by regional FWP managers and citizen volunteers and appointed by the regional supervisor, with concurrence of the FWP director. Regional CACs will consist of no more than 16 members who volunteer to serve terms ranging from 2 to 4 years. While there are no formal qualifications to serve on the CAC, members will be sought who have been active in their local communities, are willing to work collaboratively, have a general understanding of public policies and resource issues and who represent a variety of interest groups and geographic communities across the region.

ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

Advisors should make a commitment to attend meetings. Members are expected to offer their thoughts and ideas, communicate with others in a respectful manner and share information about the work of the CAC with other individuals and groups as appropriate. FWP staff are likewise expected to listen attentively and respectfully. Fish, Wildlife & Parks provides logistical and administrative support of the CAC, and gathers data and information to present to the council. FWP reimburses members for expenses incurred in attending CAC meetings. Members are encouraged to contribute agenda items, invite guests and recommend topics and venues for future council meetings.

COMMUNICATION

Information about the CAC, its meetings and discussion topics will be the responsibility of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Council activities will be recorded and distributed to members and interested parties. General council information will be disseminated through regional and statewide media and FWP's web site.

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